

School merger plan wouldn't affect county

By Casey Iltis
and Tim Smith
staff writers

Districts in the Farmington area, and elsewhere in Oakland County, would not be affected by a school consolidation effort that began this month in the state Senate, one school official said.

The proposal is the first major statewide consolidation effort since the mid-1950s.

This may be the best way to narrow the funding gaps between districts, say state senators Jack Faxon and John Schwarz, co-sponsors of a new bill that would cut in half the number of districts in Michigan. Districts with fewer than 2,000 students would be affected.

In the Farmington area, there are no districts small enough to be swallowed up under provisions of the bill, said Helen Prutow, Farmington school board president and member of the Oakland County Intermediate board of trustees. She said there are few, if any, districts in the county that would be affected.

Prutow had not yet reviewed the legislation in detail, but said she could speak to the concepts presented in it.

Although Prutow agrees with the effort and believes it could save money, she said many of the smaller districts have huge geographic areas that could cause a problem.

"The numbers are small, and they're so huge geographically — it takes all day to get from one end to the other."

"Looking at it on paper, it sounds like a super idea, but I'm not sure it's workable."

INTRODUCED OCT. 4 by Faxon, D-Farmington

Hills, and Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, the state legislature would set up a nine-member commission to study how to reduce the state's current 562 districts to no more than 250 to increase efficiency. The bill would become law unless rejected by a two-thirds vote of the state Legislature.

The result, the lawmakers said, would be to narrow the disparities in spending among districts, reducing the need for school finance reform that prompted two proposals on this November's ballot. Schwarz, chairman of the Senate Education and Mental Health Committee, said he plans to open hearings on the legislation this fall. Efficiency is the goal of the proposed legislation, as well as eliminating "so many bureaucracies all moving in different directions," Faxon said.

"While the public is constantly bombarded with the inequalities among school districts, it's about time to realize the flaw is in the structure itself and that no amount of money is going to make an inherently inefficient and uneconomic operation better."

PRUTOW SAID she agreed with the lawmakers, who believe they will encounter resistance to the bill but want to begin discussion on the issue.

"It is a debate that has to start. I would not dismiss the bill," she added.

Aside from the proposed state legislation, local debate has centered around whether to dissolve the Clarenceville district and merge it into surrounding districts. Clarenceville serves residents of Farmington Hills, Livonia and Redford Township.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Grand jury indicts 4 men

Continued from Page 1

the shooting death of Larry Freeman, 26, also of Southfield.

Redd, an engineer at the Chrysler Corp., is accused of killing Freeman in a dispute over a woman Dec. 17, 1987, said Thompson.

At his arraignment, Redd was denied bond and sent for preliminary examination to 46th District Court in Southfield.

• Selwan Sabah Kesto, 19, of West Bloomfield, who was arrested and charged with delivering cocaine last March.

Charges against Kesto were initially dismissed, Thompson said. But they were reinstated after witnesses testified to the grand jury.

Bond for Kesto was set at \$100,000 pending preliminary examination in Southfield's 46th District Court.

THOMPSON SAID the indictments against the men is "proof that the grand jury will be an effective law enforcement weapon." Thompson said.

"When a police officer talks with a witness," Thompson said, "the witness can tell him to go fly a kite."

"But when the grand jury calls a witness, he (or she) must testify" or face the possibility of contempt of court charges. No witnesses have yet cited the Fifth Amendment or faced contempt citations, Thompson said.

The witness can take the Fifth Amendment, a protection against self incrimination, Thompson said.

"But the jury has the option of granting immunity" and forcing them to talk, he said.

The grand jury — called specifically to review Oakland's unsolved murders and the illegal drug delivery network — was requested by Thompson in February and approved by a majority of the county's 14 circuit court judges.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners provided \$50,000 for expenses and remodeled the third floor of the county executive office building for them.

The grand jury has held six working sessions and is still convened, Thompson said.

Under Michigan law, a grand jury can convene for six months and can be extended just once.



JOHN STORMZAND/staff photographer

At 81, Jewel Cooke still can swim 1,000 yards and coach young swimmers at several area schools.

Instructor-coach still in the swim at age 81

By James Radebaugh
staff writer

Jewel Cooke says she's slowing down, naturally, but isn't ready to give up.

The 81-year-old swimming instructor still coaches swimming in West Bloomfield, Livonia and Farmington Hills each week and finds time to swim on her own at Oakland Community College two or three times a week.

Two Wednesdays ago, she was back in the pool at West Bloomfield High School, passing the tests required for Red Cross lifesaving recertification.

"My hair's wet most of the time," she said.

Cooke has a long history in swimming (her mother told her she was doing it before she could walk) and coaching that have made her instruction very much in demand. It was 11 years ago that she retired after 20 years as an American Athletic Union coach in Garden City.

UNDER HER leadership, the Garden City team produced a number of first-rate swimmers, according to Peg Weikal, a pool supervisor employed by West Bloomfield Community Education, the organization that sponsors Cooke's instruction in West Bloomfield.

In the 30 years she's been coaching in Livonia, she's watched her athletes grow from young adults, to parent

people

and grandparents, Weikal said.

Last year, Cooke won a first-place gold medal and set a national record for her age group in United States Masters competition in Ann Arbor.

Cooke, who grew up in Chicago, said she started swimming in Lake Michigan as a child and worked on her technique at the Eaton School for Girls in Toronto, where she attended college. Her ambition was to become a physical education teacher, which she did at a Chicago boarding school.

"She's a pretty remarkable lady," said Weikal, who said she has "absolutely no" reservations about Cooke's ability to keep pace with the job.

THE SUCCESS that Cooke has had as a coach comes from the emphasis she puts on stroke technique. Once an efficient technique is mastered, speed will come, she said. "Swimming is a beautiful thing," she adds.

Needless to say, Cooke is in good health and can do things people less than half her age can't — such as swimming 1,000 yards, as she does when she works out at OCC.

Wayne commission hears C'ville recall group

Continued from Page 1

A grass-roots group trying to recall five Clarenceville School District trustees will get a second chance Wednesday to get their petitions approved by the Wayne County Elections Commission.

In September, the commission rejected recall petitions presented by the group, the Community to Dissolve Clarenceville.

A second hearing before the commissioners is scheduled for 9 a.m. in Room 211 of the City-County Building in Detroit.

The commissioners rejected the petitions the first time because they were unclear.

SINCE THEN, group members have rewritten the petitions to read as follows:

"We feel that the above trustee of the Clarenceville School Board

of Education has ignored the concerns of the residents of the Clarenceville School District.

"After looking at our school taxes and educational benefits we feel there is just cause to consider the possibility of annexation with the Farmington and Livonia school districts."

"The above named trustee has been asked to consider this possibility and, even though it is not the duty of this trustee to present annexation to the voters, he or she does have the authority."

After the commission's rejection in September, group members said they would continue to change the petition's language and refile them until they got petitions that were acceptable to the commission.

ULTIMATELY, THE group hopes to recall five of the seven

school trustees and elect a school board that would be willing, despite their own personal views, to put the issue of dissolving the Clarenceville school district on the ballot.

The issue has divided the community, spurring other residents to form Citizens to Save Clarenceville.

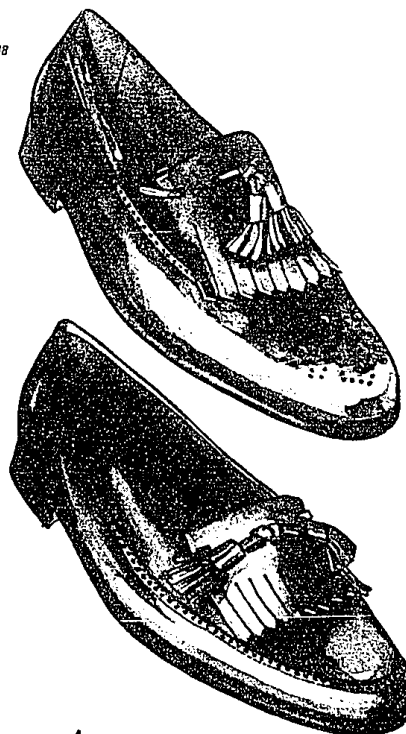
"School districts need enough students to provide an adequate educational program and to operate efficiently," group spokeswoman Tammy Iaconelli said, in explaining the drive to recall board members and ultimately dissolve the district.

"There is a very real question as to whether adequate curriculum choices and teacher specialization are available in smaller school districts."

The district's current enrollment is 1,815 students.

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Farmington GOP sponsors candidate night

The Farmington Area Republican Club will host a candidates night for candidates seeking the club's endorsement for Farmington Hills City Council.

The event will be 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 20, in the Botsford Inn, Farmington Hills.

According to club president Patrick Anderson, "Our club has an important interest in maintaining good government in our community, based on traditional Republican principles. At the candidate's night, each candidate will speak about his or her support for those principles

and why they seek our endorsement."

The bylaws of the Farmington Area Republican Club require that a candidate receive a two-thirds majority vote to obtain the club's endorsement.